



The Farnham Society

Chairman's

Report to Annual General Meeting 2021.

It could be claimed that some progress has been made since last year's email-based AGM, in that we have now moved on to a participatory Zoom meeting. We delayed this AGM in the hope that the Covid problem would have lessened significantly, and we could have called a normal AGM. However, the general view was that we should wait for a further period before hopefully reverting to our usual procedures next year.

Our continued review of the Society's structure has already produced results that will undoubtedly stand us well for the future. One tangible result is the significant improvement of our website which now has the capacity to provide much wider ranges of information and is easier to navigate. We have also reviewed the Rules of The Society and we will be seeking your formal approval for the changes at this meeting.

It is with regret I have to record the retirement of Michelle Quinlan and John Slater from the Committee. Over the past three years, Michelle has given greater emphasis in style, quality and publicity of our public meetings which have resulted in an increase in the flow of new members. Her involvement in restructuring our website has involved many hours of negotiating and research. With a growing and successful family business, spare time has become limited, and this has understandably caused Michelle to step back from active participation on the Executive Committee. John Slater joined the Committee seven years ago and whether there was a need for planning or action you could rely upon John's involvement. It was his observations which first drew attention to the inaccuracy of Waverley's air quality data and the subsequent enquiry which caused considerable changes to be made and now the accurate data is readily available to all members of the public. He has also represented the Society at Farnham Conservation Area Management Plan meetings and has been a leading member of our Planning Committee. We will miss them both, but they have each left a valuable legacy that has strengthened the ongoing aims of the Society. On a positive note, we have welcomed the appointment of Paul Fry and Josh Goddard to the Committee. Paul's background is in Media and for many years he has been actively involved in local charities. Josh Goddard will be known by many members in his role as the Curator of The Museum of Farnham. We welcome them both.

I also wish to thank David Howell, who although he indicated that he was standing down at the last AGM he continued in office for several months whilst we were seeking a successor. This was a very helpful decision which gave us some time to review the situation and we are grateful for David's generosity. Unfortunately, we were unable to find an individual to take on this role which has led us to review our planning procedures.

Whilst the Planning Committee is still fully active and in place, we have been obliged to reflect on our role in examining all planning applications and consultative documents and have concluded that with the explosion of applications and our limited resources, we must limit our involvement in what has become a demanding burden falling onto a small group of volunteers. We will remain alert and respond to any application which could have an adverse effect on Farnham and when requested, continue to provide support to members and local Residents Associations.



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With Covid's tentacles still strangling face to face activities, particularly in confined spaces, our Heritage Open Days Committee were confronted with a second year of frustration but again came up with a programme of events that captured the interest of the public to the point that virtually all events were oversubscribed. It was possible by careful controls being put in place to hold events at the Castle which attracted some 600 people and there were also strong attendances at the Museum of Farnham, the Rural Life Living Museum, Pierrepont, and the Farnham Pottery. It is hoped that many of those attending will now appreciate what is available and make return visits. The outside events ranged from accompanied walks to a tractor-pulled tour of Coxbridge Farm. In all about 30 events were organised by our HODs Committee and brilliantly supported by the many volunteers who make this all possible. Not often you can have a day's entertainment free of charge.

Also free of charge we have continued our commitment to heritage and conservation in the town by issuing a booklet titled *The Courtyards and Passages of Farnham* and we have been delighted that the demand for this booklet has been consistently high. It is a high-class publication, well thought out with high-quality photographs and an informative narrative. We have Michael Blower, John Slater and David Howell to thank for this fascinating insight into some little known parts of Farnham. Free copies remain available at the offices of Farnham Town Council and Waterstones.

Looking forward, we have the advantage, not shared by too many similar organisations, of a strong financial base and it has been encouraging to find that despite all the problems, our membership numbers have held steady. It is hoped that our efforts to increase communications in somewhat different formats from the past has had a positive effect. We are tentatively exploring the possibility of extending our membership by offering corporate membership to organisations that share our objectives and we will again try to find a link into schools. It is also believed that closer cooperation with local and similar organisations is an objective worth pursuing. We have considerable ambitions and ideas with the only restriction being on the time available to existing Committee Members.

Another restrictive year has passed and yet we have emerged in good order and full of confidence that the Society maintains a strong influence in local heritage matters and has a committee that will continue to defend the best interests of Farnham. My closing thoughts are to thank the Committee Members for all their selfless and generous commitment in time and effort and to the Members for their continuing support.

Alan Gavaghan.

October 2021.